

Gratefulness – How Others Have Benefited My Life

GRATEFULNESS is defined in the dictionary as the 'appreciation of benefits received.' It is learning to recognize the benefits which G-d and others have provided. It is also looking for appropriate ways to express genuine appreciation. It is ultimately giving all my expectations to G-d. (*"My soul, wait thou only upon G-d; for my expectation is from him."* Ps 62:5) In summary, gratefulness is communicating to others the precise ways in which they have benefited our life, and looking for ways to honor them. The opposite of gratefulness is *PRIDE*. Pride is believing that I have achieved what G-d and others have done for me and through me. We should be acknowledging the fact that everything that we have is the result of G-d and others investing in us. As Scripture states: *"After all, what makes you so special? What do you have that you didn't receive as a gift? And if in fact it was a gift, why do you boast as if it weren't?"* (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Gratefulness is an attitude of indebtedness along with the motivation to adequately express that attitude. It is recognizing that in ourselves we have nothing, and that we are nothing, and that whatever we do have, we owe to G-d, to our parents, to our family, and to others.

The word *gratefulness* is expressed in the *B'rit Chadasha* by the Greek word (*yoo-kar-iss-TEH-oh*), which means "to be thankful and express gratitude:" **Yoo** means "good or well," and; *charis* means "grace." *Grace* is the desire and the power that G-d gives us to do His will. *"In everything give thanks, for this is what G-d wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua."*(1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Has G-d Commanded Us to Be Grateful?

- *Be grateful to G-d: "I will praise God's name with a song and extol him with thanksgiving."* (Psalm 69:30).
- *Be grateful to your parents: "Honor your father and mother . . ."* (Ephesians 6:2-3). *"People will be self-loving, money-loving, proud, arrogant, insulting, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy"* (2 Timothy 3:2).
- *Be grateful for your conscience: "I give thanks to G-d, whom, like my forbears, I worship with a clean conscience, as I regularly remember you In my prayers night and day."* (2 Tim. 1:3)
- *Be grateful to your Congregational elders: "The leaders who lead well should be considered worthy of double honor, especially those working hard at communicating the Word and at teaching."* (1 Timothy 5:17)
- *Be grateful to your civil authorities: "Be respectful to all—keep loving the brotherhood, fearing G-d and honoring the emperor."* (1 Peter 2:17)
- *Be grateful to your employer: "Those who are under the yoke of slavery should regard their masters as worthy of full respect, so that the name of G-d and the teaching will not be brought into disrepute."* (1 Timothy 6:1)

Did Yeshua demonstrate Gratefulness?

- He thanked G-d constantly, e.g., *"...Father, I thank you that you have heard me."* (see John 11:41)
- He thanked His parents. He emphasized the importance for caring for parents in Mark 7:10-13 and cared for His own mother during His agony. (see John 19:26-27)
- He honored His conscience. He was able to receive the gratefulness of Miryam, Levi, Nicodemus and others because He had a good conscience. (Luke 7:36-50)
- He honored His elders. He directed and deflected the gratefulness and the customary offering of one He had cleansed to the priest. (see Mark 1:40-44)
- He honored His rulers. He encouraged gratefulness and respect toward rulers by instructing His disciples to pay taxes and to "go the second mile." (see Matt. 17:24-27)
- He honored employers. In the parable of the hired laborers He taught employees to be grateful for the generosity of employers. (see Matt. 20:1-16)

How Do We Express Gratefulness by Redirecting Praise?

Every time someone thanks us for doing good or praises us for some achievement, we have an important opportunity and responsibility to express gratefulness to G-d and to others. Whatever we have accomplished has not been done by our efforts alone. Many others have helped us. Most importantly, G-d has made it all possible. If we thank people for their praise and fail to acknowledge the work of others, we give the false idea that we accomplished it all. Such a response would demonstrate pride. Whenever someone thanks you or praises you, do the following:

- Thank the one who praises you. A bright, cheery "thank you" will be a pleasant reward to the person who is expressing the quality of gratefulness to you.
- Praise the one who thanks you. When you are thanked, identify a character quality that you can praise in return. If you are thanked for helping someone, you could say, 'Thank you! You are very *kind* in saying that.' If complimented for an achievement, you could answer, 'Thank you! You are *very thoughtful* to encourage me.' If you are praised by one who exhibits the same quality, you could say, 'Thank you! You have been an example to me in this area.' Genuine praise gives energy!
- Recognize those who helped you. Be prepared to acknowledge immediately those who helped you do that for which you were just praised. Here are some examples: "I am grateful for my parents' training," "I had some very good teachers," "It was a team effort, and I could not have done it without..." or "I am grateful to G-d for making it possible for me to do this." A proper response usually requires much forethought in order for it to be accurate and appropriate.
- Distinguish praise from flattery. *Praise* is pointing out a specific character quality in another person and telling him how it has benefited your life. *Flattery* is an exaggerated compliment, usually given with an ulterior motive. Flattery brings destruction. G-d compares flattery as a net that catches its prey in Prov. 29:5 and states its dangers in Prov. 26:28 "...a flattering mouth causes ruin."

Keys to Gratefulness

The more we realize how indebted we are to G-d and deserving of nothing but eternal judgment, the more grateful we will be for the many ways He and others benefit us.

One day Simon, a Pharisee, invited *Yeshua* to his home for a meal. During the meal a repentant woman came in, wept over His feet and then wiped His feet with her hair. Simon murmured against *Yeshua* for letting an immoral woman touch Him, but He said: "A *certain creditor had two debtors; the one owed ten times as much as the other. When they were unable to pay him back, he canceled both their debts. Now which of them will love him more?*" (*Luke 7:41-42*) Simon answered that the one who was forgiven the most would be most grateful. *Yeshua* commended him for a right answer and then explained that the woman who was weeping had been forgiven many sins, and, therefore, she was very grateful to G-d.

The woman who washed Messiah's feet was repentant for her many sins. Each of us is also guilty of many sins when we compare our lives to the holy standards of G-d's Torah. (See Exodus 20.) We can follow her good example by repenting of our pride and willfulness and receiving the forgiveness that *Yeshua* has already provided for us by His death on the execution stake. (See John 3:1-17.)

O G-d, I recognize that I am a great sinner and deserving of eternal judgment. I thank You for sending Messiah *Yeshua* to pay the penalty for all my sin, and I do now receive Him as Lord and Savior. Thank You for hearing this prayer and for giving me eternal life.

I. **Expressing Gratefulness to G-d**

- List the daily ways G-d benefits you.** Every day G-d gives us multitudes of benefits which we tend to take for granted. When was the last time you thanked G-d for the air that you breathe? or the ability to enjoy a meal? or for the sound of singing birds? or the measure of health that you have
- Recall G-d's help during crises.** Whenever we face a crisis or major need, we tend to cry out to G-d for His help. After He gives help and the crisis is past, we often fail to thank G-d for His divine assistance. Sometimes we even fail to acknowledge that it was G-d Who protected us from disaster or provided for our needs.
- Turn your gratefulness into a song.** David commemorated G-d's help by writing a Psalm or song or by giving an offering. Remember the last time G-d helped you, and write out a document of gratefulness to Him.
- Learn and praise the names of G-d.** G-d reveals Himself to us by the meanings of His names. David instructs us to honor G-d by His names: *'Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' (Psalm 29:2).* As you read Scripture, list the names of G-d and the benefits associated with each name.
 - El Shadai - Lord G-d Almighty-His power and protection of me
 - Elohim - Creator of Heaven and Earth-His benefits through nature
 - Yeshua - The G-d of Our Salvation-eternal life through Messiah
 - El Elyon - The G-d Who Changes Not-the security of His promises
- Give thanks for the hardships of life.** It is easy to be grateful when everything is going well, but G-d wants us to thank Him 'in all things.' This includes the difficult times and the times of personal loss. After *Iov* lost all of his possessions, his health, and his children, he said, *'... Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return ... the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1:21).*
- Thank G-d when you are not thankful.** Thanking G-d is an act of obedience of the will. Being thankful is an emotion that often results when we obey the instruction: *"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of G-d..." (I Thessalonians 5:18).* When we see how difficult times are being used of G-d to build character in our lives, we will understand how all things work together for good, and we will be thankful. (See Romans 8:28.)
- Tell others how G-d has benefited you.** True gratefulness is expressing to G-d and others how He has benefited our lives. Our daily speech ought to be filled with praise to G-d for the many ways He continues to benefit us. *"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so..." (Psalm 107:2).*

Bless ADONAI, O my soul, and forget none of his benefits! He forgives all your offenses, he heals all your diseases, he redeems your life from the pit, he surrounds you with grace and compassion, he contents you with good as long as you live, so that your youth is renewed like an eagle's. (Ps 103:2-5)

II. **Expressing Gratefulness to Parents {Time Permitting}**

- Honor the sacrifices of your parents.** While you were in your mother's womb, she was limited in what she could do or eat. She experienced even greater limitations after you were born. Your father had to share your mother's attention and affection with you and also make significant financial investments in your birth and care. Find out what physical discomforts your mother experienced before and after your birth and what things your father gave up for you. Thank your parents for these sacrifices with a letter or gift, or in some other creative way that will be meaningful to them.
- Cherish what your parents have taught.** You have benefited from all the things that your parents have learned during their lifetimes. They have taught you to walk and speak and to watch out for danger. They have answered your many questions and given you instruction in a variety of areas. They have also arranged for additional training by others. Review with your parents a list of the things they have taught you and ask them to share other things that have been valuable to them.
- Choose to sit with your parents in public.** When you sit with your friends in the Congregation rather than with your parents, you are saying, "I am more grateful for my friends than I am for my parents." By sitting with your parents, however, you are publicly communicating the respect and gratefulness which you have for them and your desire that other people respect and appreciate them.
- Choose to dress for your parents.** Imitation is an expression (the highest form) of admiration. When you dress to please your parents rather than your friends, you are making a powerful public statement of gratefulness and loyalty. The very word *son* means "in the likeness of his father." In some countries it is customary for each family to have its own unique dress pattern, design, or emblem. Families that dress *in like manner* show strength and unity. You also show gratefulness by taking good care of the clothes your parents have provided for you.
- Redirect praise to your parents.** Whenever someone praises you for your actions or achievements, redirect that praise to your parents. For example, if you are praised for academic accomplishments, you should thank the person and then say, "I am grateful to my parents, who gave me a love for learning." When someone compliments you on your clothing, you could say, "My parents instilled in me the importance of proper dress."
- Celebrate your parents' special days.** Ask G-d for creativity in designing banners, posters, cards, letters, or gifts that will express your appreciation for your parents on their birthdays and anniversaries. It would even be appropriate to give your mother a gift on *your* birthday, because that day also marked a special event in her life. For significant anniversaries, ask your parents' friends to write letters of appreciation which you could compile into an album for them.
- Give your parents a grateful smile.** A warm, loving smile from sons and daughters is a wonderful gift of appreciation to parents. A **smile** communicates to all who see it that the parents are doing a good job and that their investments of time and energy are genuinely appreciated. If you are wondering whether it is appropriate to smile when you do not feel happy, ask yourself whether it is appropriate for your father to go to work when he does not feel like working. Neither is it hypocritical to smile if you do not feel like it, because the smile is not saying, "I am happy." Rather, it is stating, "I want to encourage you, because you are the one who must look at my face."
 - **An Obedient Smile.** There are actually three types of smiles. The first one is the *obedient smile*. We smile when we do not feel like it, because G-d says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice*" (*Philippians 4:4*).

- **A Ministry Smile.** The second smile is the *ministry smile*, which states, "Regardless of how I feel, I want to encourage you by letting you know that I am grateful to G-d for you, and that you are valuable to me."
 - **A Joyful Smile.** The third smile is a spontaneous expression of the joy that is in our hearts. This kind of -smile does not take effort but is a natural expression of the gratefulness we feel toward G-d and others. The importance of maintaining a cheerful attitude in the home cannot be overemphasized. When a son or daughter does not smile, parents are forced to wonder what is wrong or what they have done to offend their child. The absence of a smile communicates selfishness rather than gratefulness.
- Thank your parents for their correction.** Scripture is very clear in explaining that chastening is an expression of love. Even when parents do not chasten correctly, it is still their desire to protect you from the danger of wrong friends or activities and to train you in what is right. G-d states, "*He who fails to use a stick hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.*" (Proverbs 13:24). After receiving correction, thank your parents for giving it to you. "*We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence...*" (Hebrews 12:9).
- Find ways to please your parents.** The best way to show gratefulness to your parents is to look for ways to please them. Express gratefulness for meals by sitting at the table until everyone is finished and then volunteering to clean up. Show gratefulness for your home and car by keeping them clean.

A new year is upon us. Let us fulfill His calling upon your lives. Let us build up fathers (parents) and their children and eliminate the curse upon "our corner of the world." Let us strive to obey first and understand later whatsoever the L-rd has asked us to do. Let us resolve to seek Him and meditate in His Torah daily so whatsoever we do shall prosper. Let us finish our course and not become weary in well doing. Let us "*press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of G-d in Messiah Yeshua.*" Let us 'chazak, chazak, venitchasek,' i.e., let us be be strong, be strong and be strengthened. Let us purpose to become all He wants us to be, individually, and as His congregation. Let us be grateful to Him in everything, good and bad. May He be pleased with us in 2008!